

AGDB Proposals

Aggregate A and B season or C and D season pollock quotas when seasonal apportionments are small

The proposal allows harvest of pollock for the A and B or C and D season to be aggregated into one roe or non-roo season when a seasonal quota is less than 3,000 MT. This proposal would mirror management of the BS pollock fishery for the GOA pollock fishery creating only one roe or non-roo season, but only when quotas are low. The GOA pollock harvest strategy reduces the exploitation rate for pollock when the biomass is reduced, increasing the percentage of pollock biomass available for SSLs. Whether aggregating the quotas will continue to avoid jeopardy and adverse modification to SSLs is unknown. Since the GOA pollock management structure does not allocate quotas to individuals but continues to be managed under a limited access fishery structure there is no way to control fishing rate or effort. The proposal is not expected to impact PSC species bycatch issues or other threatened and endangered species in the GOA.

The proposal will minimize adverse social and economic impacts to fishermen, processors and GOA coastal communities. When quotas are small, NMFS management has difficulty managing the fishery to meet the available quotas. If quotas become too small then the agency may choose not to allow fishing. Additionally, these small quotas require the agency to pre-announce short fisheries since the available quotas are too small to allow the fishery to be managed in season, creating short pulse fisheries that are very inefficient and costly for both harvesters and processors.

Allow trawl pollock fishing at Cape Ugat to 3 nm

The proposal would increase pollock fishing inside critical habitat, shrinking the Cape Ugat haulout closure from 10 nm to 3 nm during the roe season timeframe. It impacts only one haulout area in the Central Gulf of Alaska. Whether opening up one area to fishing will continue to avoid jeopardy and adverse modification to SSLs is unknown. No additional area closures are offered as a trade off for the additional open area. The proposal is not expected to impact PSC species bycatch issues or other threatened and endangered species in the GOA.

The proposal will increase the available area open to trawl fishermen that are productive for pollock fishing. Additional open fishing areas will allow the fleet to spread out their fishing effort. The Shelikof Strait fishing area is one of the most dangerous for fishermen especially in the months of February and March. This proposal increases vessel safety since more inside waters will be open to fishing and more protective areas will be available to hide from weather.

Change the C season pollock fishery date from August 25th to September 1st

The fleet has voluntarily stood down until Sept 1st over the last 3 years, thus the proposal captures status quo fishing. While on the surface it appears as if the regulation change may impact Stellar Sea Lions making the fishing season shorter this is not the case. The length of the fishery during the C season is determined by pollock catch rates and typically closes when the available quota is reached not the regulatory closure date.

The main goal of the proposal is to avoid conflicts in processing by adjusting the seasonal structure of the pollock C season. Postponing the C season pollock fishery by six days (August 25 to Sept 1) allows the salmon season to wind down before pollock fishing begins. It is difficult to coordinate a fleet stand down each year since vessels compete for the available quota. Having the regulations capture status quo will relieve conflicts amongst the trawl fleet to coordinate a stand down. The proposal is not expected to impact PSC species bycatch issues or other threatened and endangered species in the GOA.

Use a different apportionment scheme for Pacific cod seasons in the GOA

The proposal which is supported by virtually all cod participants in the GOA, would increase fishing opportunity during the A season. The present seasonal structure for the GOA is more restrictive than in the BSAI where trawlers are allowed to catch 80% of their allocation before June 10th. It is unclear if this regulatory would avoid jeopardy and adverse modification to SSL. Scientific information is conflicted with some information suggesting that the winter period is less critical to SSLs than summer / fall months. This proposal has several options that can be employed to reduce impacts to SSLs including a range of allocation changes for the A season. Additionally, pending Council action that would allocate Pacific cod to gear sectors in the GOA may allow different seasonal structures for the different gear participants.

The proposal would provide economic benefits to harvesters of all gear types, processors and coastal communities in the Gulf of Alaska. Presently, the B season allocation of Pacific cod is difficult to catch because cod is not aggregated. Costs and PSC bycatch are driven up by fishing in the B season when catch rates are lower. If the seasonal apportionment was changed with more quota available during the A season, GOA harvesters would most likely meet the available TAC and PSC bycatch would go down. Safety would be most likely be increased since more vessels participate in the fishery during the A season than B season.

Data Request

Additional data request for aggregation of A and B season or C and D season pollock quotas – amount of prey that remains for Stellar Sea Lions compared to fish removals. The model for the GOA pollock fishery reduces fishing mortality as the biomass declines. Thus when pollock quotas are low, fishing mortality is reduced. Request that Martin Dorn, with AFSC, examine the amount of pollock prey that remains for SSL based on changes in allowable fishing mortality in the fishery. Additionally, evaluate what the likely B value (unfished spawning biomass) would be when these aggregations would be triggered.